

Reply dated March 15, 2004

Reply to Office Action dated December 19, 2003

REMARKS

At the outset, Applicants thank the Examiner for the thorough review and consideration of the subject application. The Non-Final Office Action of December 19, 2003 has been received and its contents carefully reviewed.

In the Non-Final Office Action, the Examiner rejected claim 1 under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Tsubota et al. (U.S. Patent No. 5,629,787) in view of Nakamura et al. (U.S. Patent No. 5,835,181), Inoue et al. (U.S. Patent No. 6,285,435), and Hida et al. (U.S. Pat. No. 5,936,695); allowed claims 10-17; and objected to claims 2-9 as being dependent upon a rejected base claim but would be allowable if rewritten in independent form including all of the limitations of the base claim.

By this Amendment, Applicants hereby cancel claim 7 without prejudice or disclaimer, amend claims 1, 14, and 15, and add new claims 18-26. Accordingly, claims 1 and 3-26 are proposed to be pending in this application.

Applicants thank the Examiner for the allowance of claims 10-17 and for the indication of allowable subject matter in claims 2-9. Applicants have amended claim 1 to include the features of claim 7 consistent with the Examiner's suggestion in the Non-Final Office Action. Accordingly, Applicants submit that claim 1, and claims 2-6, 8, and 9, which depend from claim 1, are in condition for immediate allowance. Further, Applicants respectfully submit that claims 18-26 are also allowable over Tsubota et al. in view of Nakamura et al., Inoue et al., and Hida.

If the Examiner deems that a telephone conversation would further the prosecution of this application, the Examiner is invited to call the undersigned at (202) 496-7500.

Application No.: 09/764,112

Docket No.: 8733.387.00-US

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If these papers are not considered timely filed by the Patent and Trademark Office, then a petition is hereby made under 37 C.F.R. §1.136, and any additional fees required under 37 C.F.R. §1.136 for any necessary extension of time, or any other fees required to complete the filing of this response, may be charged to Deposit Account No. 50-0911. Please credit any overpayment to deposit Account No. 50-0911. A duplicate copy of this sheet is enclosed.

Dated: March 15, 2004

Respectfully submitted,

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